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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HAVANA 000668

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SUBJECT: CUBA: TWO PATHS TO REGIME CHANGE

HAVANA 00000668 001.3 OF 003

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Buddy Williams; Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: Cuba's two most prominent dissident leaders, Martha Beatriz Roque (MBR) and Oswaldo Paya, have described to us their hopes and plans for transforming the Cuban regime, a process that neither of them claims to be able to make happen in the short term. MBR sees her own role as a catalyst to put increasing numbers of Cubans on the streets to protest against significant examples of injustice. The regime, she says, is deathly afraid of large numbers of people in the streets not under its own control. Paya envisions a more evolutionary change, building upon the network he established with the Varela Project. He recently published a roadmap called "Forum for All Cubans" that envisions a dialogue between representatives of civil society and the regime--not to negotiate power sharing, but rather to chart a future democratic course. The ruling palace needs to crumble more to provide an incentive for regime participation; but meanwhile, Paya's Christian Liberation Movement (MCL) is active spreading information to the public about claiming their universally recognized rights as citizens. Neither MBR or Paya proposes joining operational forces, but they have grown to respect one another more and more over time. They both see a U.S. role in regime change: MBR wanting more and faster disbursements of cash to mobilize her forces; and Paya wanting the USG to be a catalyst for civil society talks with the regime. End Summary.

MBR: People in the Streets:

12. (C) In early 2007 MBR told us that she would be removing herself from the leadership of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC), to allow herself some distance from the day to day of managing that organization's activities and finances. In February, after the "Independent Library Congress," that the APSC organized, she took a step back and asked herself: "Is what I'm doing busy-work or is it really going to change the regime?" She concluded that she would delegate the "busy-work" of the APSC to Felix Bonne and Rene Gomez Manzano, and dedicate herself to bigger-picture issues and ultimately, a plan to put thousands of Cubans into the streets.

13. (C) Thus far MBR has done some regular publishing of communiques and articles critical of the regime, set up a web-site, led a press conference to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the dissident manifesto called "The Country

Belongs to All of Us," and mobilized her APSC network around certain targeted causes. Three specific cases motivated MBR to spring into action in the last few months: (1) Traveling to Placetas, in Villa Clara province last weekend to fight for recently released political prisoner Jorge Luis Perez Antunez to obtain housing; (2) leading a caravan of dissidents to Camaguey last month to submit a petition of Habeas Corpus in the case of a political prisoner whose sentence was prolonged without due process; and (3) organizing a street demonstration in front of a downtown Havana court to protest the re-arrest, on a fake charge, of a political prisoner who had recently been released.

¶4. (C) MBR told us that she learned valuable lessons from each deployment. She went ahead with the Villa Clara trip without waiting for the APSC to formally get involved, but had mobilized her network directly in the central-Cuban province. She observed that police and state security were tough but deferent towards her because she was working within the system's own rules and because she drew a sympathetic crowd. She obtained similar results in the Camaguey trip, but brought Rene Gomez Manzano along, since he is the APSC's best lawyer. Again, she succeeded in putting local followers of hers into the streets, a factor that she believes got her through the court-house's door with the Habeas Corpus petition. She told us that in preparation for the Havana courtroom protest, two months ago, she had mobilized at least a hundred Cubans, and in a way that she knew the GOC would capture with telephone intercepts. The regime dismissed the case on the eve of the hearing, which MBR believes was a direct consequence of her mobilization.

¶5. (C) MBR recognizes that she needs to expand her following to be able to deploy more than hundreds at a time, and regrets that she has not yet teamed up with any of the dissident youth organizations. On the other hand, she claims

HAVANA 00000668 002.3 OF 003

to have gained considerable name and face recognition throughout the country, and believes that she can build numbers if/when events unfold to provide new protest opportunities. Her bottom line is that the regime is sensitive to people power, and that the absence of large street protests has been a key factor contributing to Raul Castro's staying power.

Paya: Cubans Will Claim Their Rights:

¶6. (C) Oswaldo Paya takes a more evolutionary approach, but one that also starts with a large-scale mobilization. The starting point is the constituency the MCL built when it obtained tens of thousands of signatures for the Varela Project, which was a petition to request a review of the form of government, according to provisions in the existing constitution. Fidel Castro nixed the Varela Project in 2003, decreeing that Cuba's socialism was unalterable and permanent; however, the MCL did not wither away. Last year the MCL claims to have involved 12,000 Cubans in a follow-up project to create a draft constitution and road map for a democratic transition, called "Program for All Cubans."

¶7. (C) At the end of June, 2007, Paya and his deputy, Minervo Lazaro Chiret, drafted an updated version of the "Program for All Cubans," dubbed the "Forum for All Cubans." Both documents outline a set of basic, non-negotiable rights to which all Cubans are entitled, and urge a negotiation between representatives of civil society and the current (Castro rubber stamp) National Assembly to begin the process of constitutional reform. Expecting that the (Castro rubber stamp) Assembly will not agree to participate, Paya and the MCL will fan out around the island and spread the word about claiming citizens' rights. Paya believes that the message will have great resonance, since all Cubans chafe at restrictions of their rights to live where they want, travel,

open a small business, stay at a hotel, or more generally, enjoy the same rights that any foreigner has when he visits Cuba.

18. (C) Paya and Lazaro Chiret also believe that a message based on citizens rights will have added appeal because of island-wide pent-up expectations for change that have been unmet since Fidel Castro's incapacitation almost a year ago. They acknowledge that Castro's death will hasten the collapse of the ruling "palace," but don't want to sit on their hands doing nothing until that happens.

Role for the USG:

19. (C) Both MBR and Paya believe the USG is on the right side of the coming transition, and are satisfied with public statements by the President, the Secretary and others regarding the inevitability of change, the illegitimacy of a Castro-brother succession, and the responsibility of Cubans themselves to lead the transition. Operationally, MBR wants USG support in the form of continued public exhortations for democracy and release of political prisoners, and also cash. For example, she said her last trip to Villa Clara cost her 250 dollars to hire a car and driver. Renting a car would have cost half as much but ordinary Cubans are not allowed to rent cars. Multiply times the numbers of Cubans to be mobilized in any given demonstration, calculate bus and taxi fares, plus food, and aid to dissidents' families, and the costs add up. She has told us frequently that her sources of cash from Miami have been both inconsistent and insufficient.

110. (C) Paya, who gets his cash quietly from NDI, thank you, wants the USG to find a formula to engage the regime. He said he was usually misunderstood on the subject of engagement, and rejects the Spanish approach, which serves to buttress the regime at the expense of the democratic opposition. Recognizing that the USG would not legitimize Raul Castro's rule, Paya suggests a formula whereby the USG would agree to talk to the GOC about purely bilateral issues (say, drug trafficking, migration, Guantanamo), but on the condition that the GOC open simultaneous talks with the democratic opposition. Paya would not seek such talks with the regime to achieve any kind of power sharing, but rather negotiate Cuba's future, according to the "Program for All Cubans" roadmap. Paya does not believe the regime would

HAVANA 00000668 003.3 OF 003

accept such terms from either the USG or the democratic opposition, but thinks the idea of a USG proposal, ANY proposal, would electrify the dissident movement and the population at large, while also pulling the rug out from under the regime's "Blame America First" argument and constituency.

Comment:

111. (C) MBR and Paya have developed a greater respect for one another, and no longer waste needless energy competing for top billing among the dissident movement. Both are reference points for the entire opposition; groups who visit Havana from the interior will commonly be signers of the Varela Project and also participants in the APSC. MBR and Paya's visions and plans are complementary, although not coordinated. MBR is more flashy, and believes that the country is full of dry kindling and firewood that need sparks. Paya, on the other hand, wants to ploddingly take apart the totalitarian structure brick by brick and then rebuild a democratic society on its grave. Unfortunately, neither has yet obtained critical mass to bring down the regime in the short term. Our expectation is that the still-missing ingredient is Fidel Castro's funeral.

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